

# Child Support Report

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## COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

### Resolving to Do Better

Scott Lekan, Commissioner, OCSE



When people change their calendars for the new year, conversations traditionally turn to the topic of resolutions — those things we want to change or improve about ourselves. You may have a full-page list where others don't make any at all. While I don't make formal resolutions, I am a very reflective person. I continually look back on where I've been to make good decisions about where I need to go.

Did you know there have actually been studies to measure the success rate of New Year's resolutions? Interestingly, the studies show that more people are making resolutions each year, and that they get greater results when their efforts coincide with the New Year.

### Defining change

Resolutions begin when we identify something we want or need to improve. We achieve our resolutions when we take purposeful action to adopt a new process that will produce a better outcome. Under that definition, child support agencies make resolutions all year long. With customer service and performance measures as guideposts, specific child support resolutions might include revising a lengthy form, automating the application process, starting a paternity campaign at prenatal clinics, making a questionnaire more father-friendly, putting more information out on the web, or adding an option for parents to request text notifications instead of callbacks.

### Idea exchange

I don't need to tell you to make child support resolutions. There are improvements in progress all across the child support program. In fact, there are many we don't even know about. So that is my first challenge to you for 2019. Don't we always want to know how someone made a remarkable transformation so that we might be able to achieve similar success? The same is true of child support resolutions and performance improvements. OCSE and your child support colleagues would appreciate learning about your innovations and hearing about the results. Even a failure can be a success because others can learn what doesn't work, and try a different approach.

Let's return to our guideposts. Customer service improvements your agency is making might work just as well for your colleagues. So take stock, and consider sharing your child support resolutions more purposefully, and more broadly. OCSE has several outlets for information sharing that you can use, including technical assistance site visits, regional meetings, or topic meetings such as Intergovernmental, Tribal, or Urban Jurisdiction. And don't forget about [Child Support Report](#) and my [Commissioner's Voice blog](#). We have also hosted training webinars, learning communities, and peer mentor cohorts. There are lots of ways we can support idea and knowledge exchange.

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## Veterans and Military Liaison Network Quarterly Meeting

The network will host its next webinar at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time on February 26.

Speakers from two counties in California and a community service representative in New Hampshire will discuss their military and veterans outreach and engagement programs.

For information about the network and to participate in the webinar, contact James Murray at [james.murray@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:james.murray@acf.hhs.gov).

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## Diagnosing the problem

My second challenge to you is to ensure you pick the right resolutions. Some improvements may be beneficial to the agency in terms of staff time savings or expense reductions, but is the performance or outcome better? Your desired changes may be aimed at a well-intentioned goal such as enhanced customer service or response time. But have you determined what process improvements will reduce the customer difficulty and frustration that leads to the contact?

OCSE has been conducting a study of behavioral interventions that has helped our staff and grantees develop expertise on problem diagnosis and intervention design. See [how Georgia used its grant](#) to improve their establishment process. They increased the number of noncustodial parents who voluntarily came to the child support office to accept service by 8.2 percentage points! Over the next two years, we'll release additional results as well as findings from smaller projects completed by our BICS Peer Learning Sites.

## Measuring improvement

Before I close out for this month, I want to return briefly to the guideposts — this time to focus on performance — as well as my challenge to make the right resolution. The most vital performance measure is collections, and I encourage you to keep that in mind when setting resolutions for improvement. While all performance measures are important, reliable support means the most to the families we serve.

Perhaps you want to try out a new collections campaign next year by sending out New Year's Resolution postcards to your nonpaying cases. To measure its effectiveness, send out a Fourth of July payment reminder, and compare the results! Then let your colleagues know about your study by sharing your findings with us. Success for one can mean improvement for all.

*Scott Lekan*

## Commissioner Participates in Child Support Chat

OCSE Commissioner Scott Lekan recently participated in an online Child Support Chat with Craig Burshem, the president of the National Child Support Enforcement Association. Their conversation touched on several topics: grants, fatherhood programs, engaging dads, updating technology, and marketing the program.

"Everybody knows what we do, but they don't always know why we do it," said Lekan. "We have to look outside the box for innovative ideas to communicate what we do and work with our community partners to get the word out and engage parents." One of the ways the child support program is doing that is with the new [Digital Marketing grant](#). OCSE awarded Section 1115 grants to nine states and two tribes so they could test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services, and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents.

Lekan also told the audience about his travels around the country. "I've been trying to see people who are outside of the child support world and engaging parents in new ways outside of ways that we normally do."



## GRANTS

# Grant Helps Caseworkers Tackle Challenging Cases

Tanya Johnson, OCSE

The [Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt](#) (PJAC) grantees moved into full project implementation nearly a year ago (see the [April 2018 Child Support Report](#)). PJAC caseworkers apply procedural justice principles at the very first step in the service delivery model as they complete a comprehensive review of a parent's cases randomly assigned to the treatment group. Case managers engage both parents to build an understanding of why child support has gone unpaid and provide in-depth explanations of the child support rules, processes, and procedures applied to the cases. They apply all the principles of procedural justice: voice, neutrality, understanding, respect, and helpfulness to get parents back on track and in compliance with their orders.

During OCSE's check-ins with PJAC sites, caseworkers have told us how they've been able to make progress on complex or neglected cases. It shows that this type of intensive case management can mean the difference between filing a contempt, closing a case, or collecting support. Digging deep on a case and reaching out to all parties can turn things around. We think that the following PJAC examples can be helpful for all child support professionals.

*All of the participants' names have been changed.*

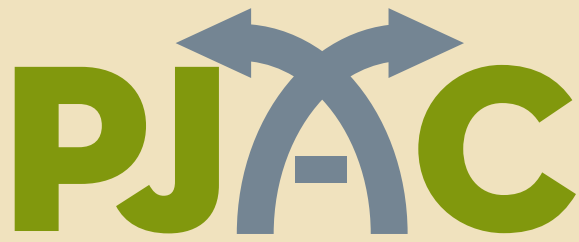
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## Overdue Case Closure in Arizona

Jonell Sullivan, Project Director, Arizona

Ten years ago, Mark relinquished his parental rights to his ex-wife, Martha, so her new husband could be their son's adoptive father. Mark and Martha agreed that his obligation to pay ongoing support terminated with the adoption. Mark attempted to provide the child support agency with documentation to close his case, but his efforts, which included visits and calls to the local office, never resulted in any action. Eventually, Mark became frustrated and just stopped taking calls from child support.

Under PJAC, the caseworker reached out to Martha to get information about the case. This was the critical piece. Martha clarified the situation and verified the information. Mark responded to a text message from the caseworker, who was then able to close his case. Mark was thrilled that someone finally listened and helped resolve his concerns.



## Procedural Justice Explained

The following is from [Grants Study Effects of Procedural Justice](#), an article in the April 2018 *Child Support Report*.

Multiple studies have found that when litigants perceive legal processes to be unbiased, helpful, respectful, understandable, and open to their side of the story, they are more likely to comply voluntarily with the legal authorities' rulings, even when those rulings aren't in a litigant's favor. The PJAC Demonstration is taking the lessons learned from these studies and applying them to child support in an effort to increase engagement with the child support program and compliance with support obligations.

According to [Procedural justice in child support](#), an article in the June 2016 *Child Support Report*, PJAC is identifying model practices to reduce the ineffective use of contempt and increase reliable support payments by focusing on procedural justice strategies.

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## Modifying Expectations and an Order in California

Will Williamson, Project Director, California

When Harold became a stay-at-home parent for his younger children, he believed that he no longer had to pay child support for his older children. Instead of moving forward to contempt of court, Harold's case was assigned to a PJAC caseworker who talked to him about California's child support policies and processes in a supportive way. The caseworker encouraged Harold to participate in the process, showed him respect, and recognized his role as a father.

With his new understanding, Harold agreed to a modified obligation and he's consistently paying now. Because of his change in circumstance, he was eligible to participate in an agency debt compromise program, and we expect him to qualify for a reduction in his arrears balance soon.

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## Uncovering a Service Error in Virginia

Michelle Franco, Project Director, *Virginia*

In October 2017, Isaac faced contempt on an administrative support order that was established when he was homeless. During the historical review of the case, the PJAC caseworker discovered that the order was not valid due to inappropriate service.

The caseworker reached out to both parents to explain the situation and establish a new order using accurate, current financial information from both parents. Additionally, the caseworker removed the arrears that had accrued under the invalid order. Now, Isaac has an obligation that is right-sized to his ability to pay; he's on track and is paying in full each month.

## Directing Payments Correctly in Ohio

Caitlin Campbell, Project Director, *Franklin County*

By starting with a phone call, a PJAC caseworker in Ohio untangled a complex case involving an out-of-state temporary custody arrangement that had essentially become permanent. Ruben, the noncustodial parent, was willing to talk but was also a little upset. He wasn't sure why he was supposed to be paying support to Jane, the named custodial parent, since their son had been living with his grandmother Stephanie for nine years. Ruben said he wanted to make sure that any child support he paid would go to the person actually raising his son.

Through additional work and communication with Stephanie, our county caseworker confirmed Ruben's account. In order to make sure payments went to support Ruben's son, the caseworker created a redirect of support. Ruben and Stephanie were both thankful to get this sorted out, and Ruben is now on track thanks to a payment plan. He will also be working with our community partners to find stable employment.

For more information, visit the [PJAC webpage](#) or contact OCSE project officers Tanya Johnson, [tanya.johnson@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:tanya.johnson@acf.hhs.gov), and Michael Hayes, [michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michael.hayes@acf.hhs.gov).

## Children's Health Data

The National Survey of Children's Health is a rich source of national and state-level information about children and families. It can help policymakers, advocates, researchers, and families understand the broad landscape of child well-being in the United States.

The [Health Resources and Services](#)

[Administration](#), part of the Department of Health and Human Services, funds and directs the survey.

Here are some facts about the survey:

- Covers multiple aspects of children's well-being (including socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive), in places where they live, play, and learn
- Provides both national, and state-level information for all 50 states and the District of Columbia
- Serves as a tool officials can use to assess need and monitor the outcomes associated with various policy decisions covering Medicaid, educational funding, and tax credits
- Supports sub-group analysis because it asks specific questions for three different age groups and offers insight into other factors including a child's sex, family income, and other characteristics
- Allows everyone access to the data free of charge through the [Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health portal](#)

For more information, watch the video: [5 Reasons to Love the National Survey of Children's Health video](#).

## Final Interstate Case Processing Training

In February, OCSE will finish its webinar training series covering interstate case processing requirements and principles. Our target audience is state trainers, central registry staff, interstate managers and caseworkers, and other interstate professionals. The final webinar, OCSE's Interstate Tools and Resources, starts at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Feb. 28.

The training resources for earlier sessions are on the [OCSE Interstate Case Processing Training Materials webpage](#).



## Including Fathers in Human Services

Jessica Pearson, Ph.D., Director, *Center for Policy Research* and Co-Director, *Fatherhood Research and Practice Network*

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recognizes the importance of fathers in helping their children develop and thrive. In 2014, ACF awarded funds to Temple University and the Center for Policy Research to create the [Fatherhood Research and Practice Network](#) to evaluate fatherhood programs, disseminate research findings, and promote the use of evidence-based practices. In May 2018, the network released findings from an examination of state-level initiatives that seek to include fathers in programs and policies dealing with families. Here are some of the cross-state patterns that emerged from the research brief, [State Approaches to Including Fathers in Programs and Policies Dealing with Children and Families](#).

- **State-level fatherhood inclusion programs are rare.** Only four states have broad, legislatively authorized initiatives known as fatherhood commissions. State fatherhood initiatives that operate in conjunction with child support agencies occur in fewer than a dozen states.
- **Leadership by child support and other state partners is key.** The executive of the state's human services department or its child support director are key to the initiation and success of state-level father inclusion initiatives. Other key leadership partners are labor departments, which can contribute a network of workforce programs and services, and child welfare agencies that have the ability to fund prevention efforts under the new [Family First Prevention Services Act](#).
- **Sustainable state funding is critical but rare.** Although 20 states nominally transfer funds such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to allowable fatherhood and two-parent household programs, the average transfer is only 0.5% of TANF funds nationwide. And many of these states use the money for other two-parent household needs such as after-school care rather than fatherhood. Only four states use child support incentive funds to support employment services.
- **Improving noncustodial parents' capacity to make economic contributions is a paramount goal.** With few exceptions, state initiatives and the programs they fund target parents who are not meeting their child support obligations because of unemployment or underemployment. The programs adopt a work first orientation and focus on assessing employment needs, providing employment services, and monitoring program compliance and child support payments.
- **Interventions that address father engagement, effective parenting, and co-parenting are less common.** State funded programs with father engagement components tend to have human services or child support agency leaders who are philosophically committed to healthy family relationships as well as employment. They also have long-standing partnerships with holistic fatherhood programs or are convinced that holistic interventions that include parenting components boost the success of workforce interventions.
- **Parents access fatherhood and workforce program services in two ways.** Some become involved on their own. Other parents receive referrals from child support caseworkers, probation officers, child welfare agency staff, or judicial orders as alternatives to incarceration or other sanctions for nonpayment.
- **Assessments of program benefits and returns on investment are very promising.** Studies of the benefits of noncustodial employment programs and fatherhood programs that have strong employment components find that child support payments and employment increase following program participation.
- **Engagement in state policy is limited.** With a few exceptions, fatherhood initiatives are focused on the delivery of services, have limited engagement in broader conversations about policies for children and families, and have had few opportunities to drive system-level change.
- **The biggest source of fatherhood funding is program specific and time limited.** Most fatherhood programs receive funding through the five-year competitive [Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grant program](#) that involved grants to 39 organizations in 19 states for a total of \$55 million per year in 2015.

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## Supporting father inclusion

Based on its review of state approaches, the network came up with six ways to improve father engagement.

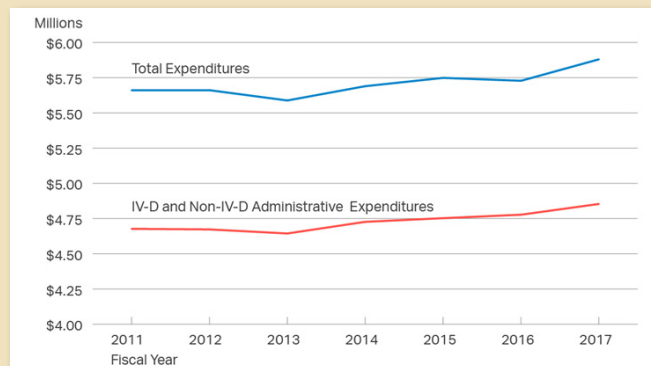
- Pursue the use of state TANF funds for fatherhood services and other father inclusion initiatives, and support holistic approaches that address both the employment and parenting needs of fathers.
- Collaborate with fatherhood programs and implement enhanced child support policies such as driver's license reinstatement and state debt compromise to support positive father engagement.
- Engage in newer initiatives dealing with two-generation and whole family programs and encourage the inclusion of nonresident fathers.
- Request that Congress change its rules to permit states to use regular child support program funds for activities dealing with fatherhood, parenting time, and employment.
- Explore the feasibility of restructuring the existing Health Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grant program along the lines of the state [Access and Visitation \(AV\) Mandatory Grants program](#). The AV program provides continuous, annual awards to states based on a formula that considers the number of children in single-parent families relative to two-parent families. It also allows each state to develop an infrastructure and programmatic strategy to deal with parenting time, and it awards grants to programs for service delivery.
- Join with other state programs and agencies, fatherhood practitioners, and other partners to create and strengthen multi-agency commissions, councils or advisory boards that convene regularly to make policies, practices, and programs more inclusive of fathers.

For more information on father inclusion, read [State Approaches to Including Fathers in Programs and Policies Dealing with Children and Families](#). Learn more about the organization on the [Federal Research and Practice Network website](#) or [become a subscriber to its electronic newsletter](#).

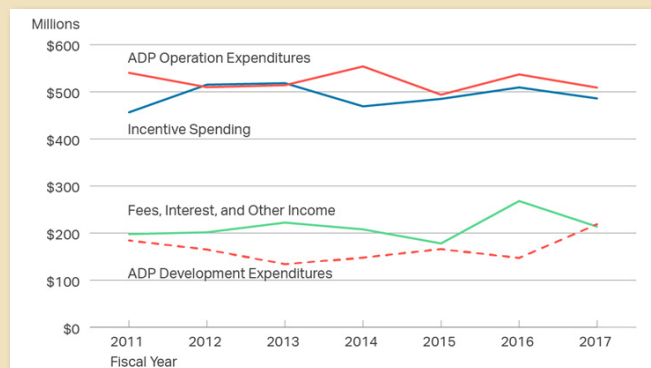
## Analyze this

### Exploring Child Support Expenditure Trends

In the latest Analyze This Data Blog, OCSE reports that total child support expenditures increased by 2.7% in 2017, the largest rise since 2011. However, IV-D and non-IV-D administrative expenditures, which account for over 80% of total expenditures, only increased by 1.6% that year.



OCSE examined other expenditure components to understand why total expenditures increased more rapidly than IV-D and non-IV-D administrative expenditures. In 2017, the only other increase was automated data processing development expenditures. See the [Analyze This blog entry](#) to learn more.



## Temporary Census Jobs

The U.S. Census Bureau is hiring temporary workers as it prepares for the 2020 census. Applicants can apply for a range of positions, including recruiting assistants, office operations supervisors, clerks, census field supervisors, and census takers, by completing a single application online. Opportunities are available nationwide and offer flexible work hours, including daytime, evenings, and weekends.

The bureau draws names from a pool of applicants as positions become available. Applications will remain active throughout the 2020 Census recruiting and hiring period.

For more information, call 855-JOB-2020 and select option three, visit the [2020 Census Jobs](#) page, or go to the Census Bureau's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [LinkedIn](#) pages.



## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

# Kentucky Collects Coats for Foster Kids

**Anya Armes Weber, Public Information Officer,  
Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

**K**entucky state employees and county attorneys collected more than 1,000 coats and hoodies for children as part of a 2018 holiday charity drive. The Cabinet for Health and Family Services' Division for Income Support, and the Kentucky County Attorneys Association held a charity drive in December that collected 1,085 coats and hoodies for children in the state's foster care program.

Staff across the state donated new coats and hoodies to the project and invited advocates and the public to drop off items at income support and county attorney offices.

The Department for Income Support includes Disability Determinations Services and the Child Support Enforcement Program. Department Commissioner W. Bryan Hubbard thanked his staff and the county attorneys for both their daily work and their efforts with the coat drive.

***"We surpassed our goal of 1,000 coats because so many people wanted to make sure that those in need are given warmth and a demonstration of human compassion."***

"The success of this project shows the generosity of those donating from their pockets – already tight at this time of year for families' own Christmases," he said. "We surpassed our goal of 1,000 coats because so many people wanted to make sure that those in need are given warmth and a demonstration of human compassion."

Income support staff also held fundraisers by taking donations for pancake breakfasts, taco bars, BLT and grilled cheese lunches, and donated for the privilege of participating in a "pajama day," among other events. The fundraisers and other donations raised more than \$4,000, which staff used to purchase new coats and hoodies.

Kentucky County Attorneys Association Vice President and Pulaski County Attorney Martin Hatfield said that helping children through child support collection efforts is a big part of what the 120 association members do, and they appreciated serving children in another way.

"This opportunity to involve ourselves and be a partner in this project extends our ability to help children," he said. "In court each and every day, we see the results of children in broken homes – including kids in foster care and kids

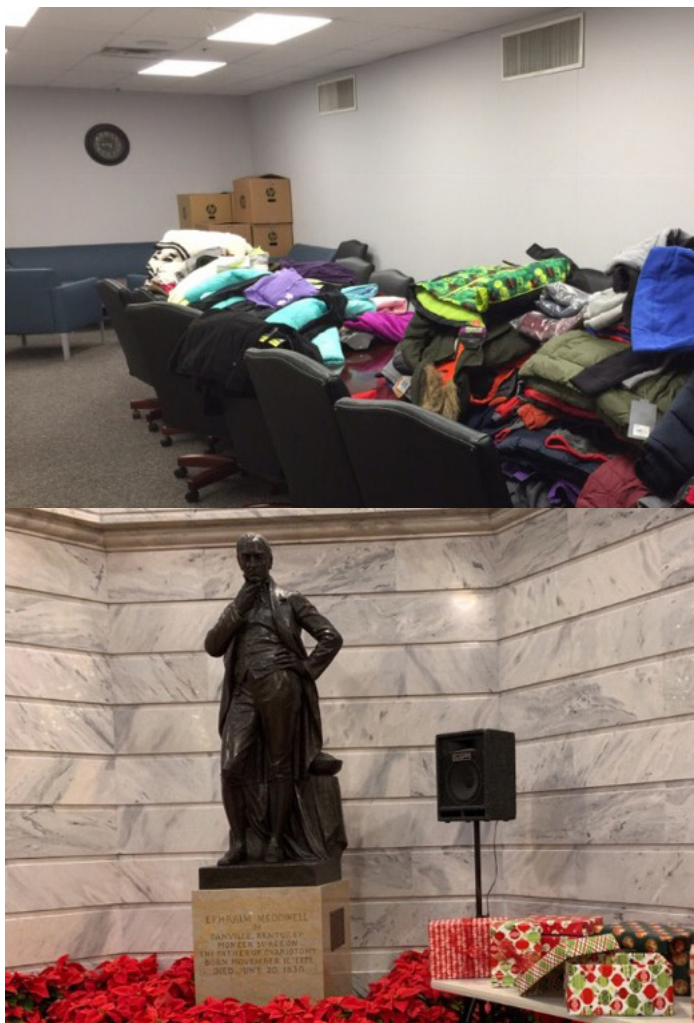
raised by other family members. Those children need all the support we can give them – not just financial support but support such as this coat drive."

Kentucky has 10,000 children in its Out of Home Care Branch, which is at a record high. Department for Community Based Services Commissioner Eric Clark thanked the staff and county attorneys for collaborating with his department and identifying the need for coats independently.

"Children in foster care will benefit from these coats – it will fulfill a physical need to keep kids warm, but also think about the social worker who is giving a child one of these coats," Clark said. "For a child in a traumatic situation like being removed or being visited by a caseworker, it gives the social worker an opportunity to invest in that child and present them with something that will open up a conversation and perhaps change the trajectory of a child's path and the family for the rest of their lives."

Clark said the coat drive is a good example of the partnership it takes to change the child welfare system.

*For more information about the event, watch the [cabinet's video story](#). To learn more about Kentucky's child support and foster care and adoption programs, visit [the Cabinet for Health and Family Services website](#).*







## Intergovernmental Cases — Increased Complexity Requires Innovation

Michelle Jadczak, Melissa Johnson, Tanya Johnson, and Tami Masuca, OCSE

When children live in a different state, tribe, or country from their noncustodial parent, child support case coordination must frequently cross jurisdictions. Intergovernmental cases that staff send between one jurisdiction and another are essential to ensure that parents support their children regardless of where they live. Approximately 1 million cases in the national child support caseload were intergovernmental and accounted for \$1.6 billion in collections in fiscal year (FY) 2017. When parents and children live in different areas, serving these families can be challenging. Child support agencies must deal with different laws, staffing levels, communication, and systems variations.

### The changing landscape

Intergovernmental casework has gotten more complex in the U.S. as the child support program has expanded. Since 2004 when Congress approved operational funding for [tribal child support agencies](#), 60 tribes have developed comprehensive tribal child support programs. The total caseload for tribal programs was nearly 59,000 in FY 2017.

[International child support](#) adds additional complexity for child support agencies. The 2007 Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance went into effect in the U.S. in January 2017. We now provide reciprocal child support services to 36 Hague Convention countries in addition to 16 other foreign reciprocating countries and provinces.

### Opportunities for innovation

As intergovernmental caseloads grow, the child support community will need creative thinking and new approaches to serve their parents and children efficiently and maximize collections for families.

For example, some child support agencies have created specialized intergovernmental teams to handle these cases. These dedicated staff develop expertise in intergovernmental law, procedures, forms, and communication with other jurisdictions so they're more efficient, can process cases quicker, and have higher collection rates.

Additional examples of intergovernmental innovation follow:

- Analyzing the activities staff use to process intergovernmental cases to ensure optimal efficiency
- Developing improved procedures for limited services in intergovernmental cases, such as obtaining certified copies of support orders
- Improving procedures and equipment to allow a party or witness residing outside the geographic area to give testimony by telephone, audiovisual, or other electronic means
- Integrating the [Federal Parent Locator Service](#) into program activities so staff can access new hire, wage, locate, and case information for individuals with child support cases. Access to the data increases a caseworker's ability to locate parents, implement income withholding orders, set appropriate child support obligations, and determine whether parties have a support order in another jurisdiction.

### Upcoming grant announcement

Finally, OCSE expects to release a funding opportunity announcement to test how child support agencies can improve intergovernmental case processing and collections very soon. The [Child Support Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grant forecast](#) has details.

For more information, contact Tanya Johnson at [tanya.johnson@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:tanya.johnson@acf.hhs.gov).

## Child Support Report

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